



Ahimsā

Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

June 2007 (2551)

Buddhist Justice

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Reprinted from *Rightview Quarterly*
(Spring 2007)

There is a definite silence in the Dharma when it comes to Buddhist justice. And with good reason. Justice, and its intimate partner, righteousness, are, as we understand them, Western theistic concepts. Concepts like retribution, revenge, and vengeance are central to Christian biblical norms and the American legal system, but are anathema to the Buddhist moral framework.

In the Hebrew scriptures, in two of the earliest books, Exodus and Deuteronomy, we see the establishment of a definition of justice, a conceptual framework for what is just and righteous, that, to this day, remains our Western understanding of justice. The first of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” implicitly establishes Yahweh as the intrinsic embodiment of justness and righteousness, in all his dealings with mankind. Deuteronomy is more explicit on this: “[Yahweh’s] word [meaning the inherent nature of actions] is perfect; for all his ways are justice; just and righteous He is.”

Later, in the New Testament book of Matthew, justice takes on a stark new clarity in the principle of an eye for an eye. The idea that justice meant the exacting of unilateral retribution had its origin in the Code of Hammurabi, developed nearly 1200 years before the Buddha and 1700 years before Jesus. This principle of retribution, that one should get what one deserves, and one should get it now, in this lifetime, became etched into our Western psyche by the moral centrality it has been given in the Christian testament with its

soteriological now-or-never belief. This notion that every wrong deserves retribution in equal measure, and immediately, is inextricably tied to the American legal system’s doctrine of a “fair and speedy” trial, a notion fundamentally incompatible with the Buddhist moral view.

There is hardly ever the mention of the word justice in the Pali literature. Why? Well, the canonized view of early Buddhism wasn’t interested in making over the socio-political world, because that samsaric world was seen as perpetuating greed, anger, and delusion — that samsaric world was the product of a deluded mind. In fact, early Buddhist thought was that there was no way to reform the system; there was, however, always an opportunity for personal liberation.

This belief that dramatic personal change is possible (as we see presented in the *Angulimala Sutta* and commentaries) arises from the belief that we, and all phenomena, are impermanent. The Western notion of a “criminal mind” or of “once a thief, always a thief” does not exist in Buddhist thought. Also, traditional Buddhist thought recog-

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- Dhamma study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the Dhamma, based primarily on Pali sources.
2. To promote practice of the Dhamma in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the Dhamma, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pali language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Group

There are currently no active programs — the Dhamma study group focusing on the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* by Ācariya Anuruddha has been permanently canceled. Those who may have questions about particular Dhamma topics or about their individual practice are encouraged to contact Allan Bomhard at (843) 720-8531 or by e-mail at bomhard@aol.com. ■

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nizes that, by encouraging or advocating for any framework of “justice,” one is starting a chain reaction, an endless back-and-forth of rival claims, with each injustice-corrected producing a new injustice that needs correcting, *ad infinitum*.

Consider, for example, the death penalty versus life without parole. Which is just? Unjust? The answer is contradictory and situational. Offenders often have very different opinions about this, some requesting death sentences and a speedy execution, others seeing the death sentence as wholly unjust for what they describe as “a really bad day on the outside.” Some people in a family where a member has been murdered want the killer “to get the death penalty”; others want the killer “to suffer” a life sentence in prison. From a classical Buddhist perspective, all of these views, not one or the other, but all, are delusions of afflicted minds.

The principle of no-self leads the Buddhists to the realization that others’ suffering and their own suffering is not inherently different. This means that when I exact retribution from you — whether through the death penalty or by life imprisonment, to extend this example —, I am in fact not getting “my fair shake,” but instead causing myself and you more suffering. And because a key criterion in ethical decision-making is whether or not the action increases or decreases suffering, “justice” can be viewed as unlikely to pass the test for wholesomeness.

To further understand why Buddhism lacks any developed idea about justice, we need to remember that the Western legalistic idea of justice assumes that, when a law is broken, things go out of balance. Punishing the offender, and exacting retribution, supposedly puts things back into balance. Nothing could be further from the Buddhist worldview, where everything is empty, dependent, and interdependent, and so nothing could be “out of balance.”

In American Buddhism today, some have adopted the view that compassion arises from seeing injustice and that we must take corrective

action as a result. This seems fundamentally incompatible with the established Buddhist moral view, wherein compassion arises from Right View informed by Right Intention; those are the foundations upon which Buddhism builds compassion, not on the slippery mountainside of perceived injustice. That being said, this author is conflicted at the sight of “injustice” — most often now exercising restraint, but at other times feeling more activist leanings.

The strongest reason for this often hard-to-accept lack of concern about justice, though, is because *karma* trumps justice in a big way. *Karma* embodies personal responsibility for all that has-does-will happen to us. *Karma* explains that there is no such thing as “causeless” suffering and that nothing is out-of-balance (and so nothing needs rebalancing to make it just). In a cosmos of causal interdependence, we are responsible for everything that has-is-will happen to us. If we want to change our *karma*, impermanence gives us a basis for doing that, but not through a rebalancing act. If the point of “Buddhist justice” and its active partner, engaged Buddhism or socially-engaged Buddhism, or of all the other justices: restorative justice, participatory justice, etc. is to change the world, then traditional Buddhist thought would view it as unwholesome. On the other hand, if the engagement is an act of compassion arising from Right View and Right Intention, then it arises from a strong wholesome base. But it is hard for this writer to see, as some modern Buddhists are claiming, that the *bodhi-sattva* vow to save all beings means we must act to change the social conditions with which we are uncomfortable. (Is that not the conceit of an afflicted self?) And it is hard for this writer to see social activism explained as a Buddhist practice based on a culturally expanded version of the Precepts — taking a vow not to kill, for example, and not to encourage others to kill for us, etc., is not intrinsically a call-to-action for abolishing the death penalty.

Nonetheless, many are following the lead of Thich Nhat Hanh in drawing on traditional Buddhist values and applying them, not to attain

personal liberation, but in an activism aimed at changing the socio-political system so it “causes less suffering.” If we look at the act, the intention behind that, and the likely outcome, it seems to this writer that one is skating on thin karmic ice. I contend that “justice” should not be an excuse to reduce Buddhism to a kind of ethical aromatherapy for making *samsāra* smell better; Buddhism is an ethical practice designed to liberate us from *samsāra*, not to sugarcoat *dukkha*. But there is wiggle room here, considerable wiggle room, even if this author finds it uncomfortable.

As Buddhism becomes more “American,” it will naturally absorb more and more of the cultural values of Americans at-large, particularly

those who are practicing Buddhism. Historically, this absorption and subsequent evolution is what has happened to Buddhism as it moved from country to country — Taoist values entered Indian Buddhism as it moved into China, Shinto values entered Chinese Buddhism as it moved in Japan, and so on. As this is happening now, here in America, a concern for justice and socially engaged justice is evolving in our practice and, it appears, will eventually become an inherent part of American Buddhism, however tenuously its justification may be based on traditional Buddhist principles. **In this, as in all matters, may we be guided by Right View and directed by Right Intention, and may our motives be informed by Wisdom. ■**

The Wheel of the Dhamma

The Buddha’s Enlightenment was a pivotal moment, one of those rare events in history when a man who has left the world returns to serve it, no longer merely human but charged with transcendent power. We can imagine how the Buddha must have shone, that bright spring morning, in the Himalayan foothills.

Dazzled by the radiance of His personality, it is said, a passing Brahmin named Dona asked Him:

Is Your Reverence a God?

No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a God.

Then, is Your Reverence a Celestial Being?

No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a Celestial Being.

A Demon then?

No, indeed, Brahmin, not a Demon.

Then, is Your Reverence a human being?

No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a human being.

Who then, pray, are You?

The Buddha replied that He had destroyed

defilements that condition rebirth as a *God*, *Celestial Being*, *Demon*, or a human being and added:

As a lotus fair and lovely is not soiled by the water, I am not soiled by the world. Therefore, Brahmin, I am a Buddha.

After spending several weeks at Gaya, the Buddha journeyed from place to place and arrived in due course at the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares, where His five former companions were residing. The five ascetics caught sight of Him from a distance and resolved neither to shun Him nor to show Him special attention. But, as He drew closer, His face shining with what He had seen and understood, they found themselves preparing a place for Him and sitting at His feet.

“Well”, one of them might have asked, “did the bowl flow upstream or downstream?”

“It flowed upstream”, the Blessed One responded. “I have done what is to be done. I have seen the builder of this house” — indicating His body, but signifying His old self — “and I have shattered its ridgepole and rafters; that house shall not be built again. I have found the deathless, the unconditioned; I have seen life as it is. I have entered *nibbāna*, beyond the reach of

sorrow.”

“Teach us what you have found.”

Thus, to those five ascetics, His first disciples, the Buddha began the work of teaching the *dhamma*, the path that leads to the end of sorrow. This event is revered as the moment when the Blessed One “set in motion the wheel of the *dhamma*”, which will never cease revolving so long as there are men and women who follow His path.

In this discourse, we see the Buddha as the physician to the world, the relentlessly clear healer whose love embraces all creatures. In the Four Noble Truths, He gives His clinical observations on the human condition, then His diagnosis, then the prognosis, and, finally, the cure:

1. The First Truth, about the universality of suffering, teaches, in short, that all forms of existence are uncertain, transient, contingent, and devoid of intrinsic self-identity and are, therefore, by their very nature subject to suffering.

Now, monks, this is the Noble Truth as to suffering: Birth (earthly existence) indeed is suffering; old age is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; likewise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Contact with the unpleasant is suffering, separation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is also suffering. In brief, desirous transient individuality (the five aggregates of bodily form, feeling, perception, predisposing mental formations, and discriminative consciousness) is suffering.

2. The Second Truth, about the origin of suffering, teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). It further explains the cause of this seeming injustice in nature by teaching that nothing in the world can come into existence without a reason or a cause and that, not only all our latent tendencies, but our whole destiny, all

weal and woe, results from causes that can be traced partly in this life and partly in former states of existence.

The Second Truth further teaches us that the future life, with all its weal and woe, must result from the seeds sown in this life and in former lives.

And again, monks, this is the Noble Truth as to the origin of suffering: It is that craving, associated with enjoyment and desire and seeking pleasure everywhere, which produces separate existence and leads to future births, and which keeps lingering on and on, that is the cause of suffering. In other words, it is craving for sense-pleasure, the desire for birth in a world of separateness, and the desire for existence to end.

3. The Third Truth, or the Truth about the cessation of suffering, shows how, through the abandoning of craving and ignorance, all suffering will vanish and liberation from *saṃsāra* (cyclic existence) will be attained.

And this, monks, is the Noble Truth as to the cessation of suffering: It is the complete cessation, giving up, abandoning of craving; it is release and detachment from craving.

4. The Fourth Truth shows the way, or the means, by which this goal is to be reached. It is the Noble Eightfold Path of Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

And this once again, monks, is the Noble Truth as to the path to the cessation of suffering: It is indeed that Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. The Middle Path, monks, leads to Nibbāna.

The Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhangikamagga*) is the path of righteousness and wisdom that really constitutes the essence of Buddhist practice — the mode of living and thinking to be followed by any true follower of the Buddha's teachings. The Noble Eightfold Path can be summed up as follows:

1. The first stage of the Eightfold Path is Right Understanding (*Sammā Ditṭhi*), that is, to view in accordance with reality suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This leads to an understanding of the true nature of existence and of the moral laws governing the same. In other words, it is the right understanding of the *dhamma*, of the Four Noble Truths. This right understanding is the keynote of Buddhism.
2. The second stage of the Eightfold Path is Right Thought (or Right Intention) (*Sammā Saṅkappa*), that is, thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), free from craving, of goodwill (*avyāpāda*), free from aversion, and of compassion (*avihiṃsā*), free from cruelty. This leads to a pure and balanced state of mind, free from sensual lust, ill will, and cruelty.

By *saṅkappa* is meant the mental state (*vitakka*), which, for want of a better English rendering, may be called “initial application”. This important mental state eliminates wrong ideas, or notions, and helps the other moral adjuncts to be diverted to *nibbāna*.

It is one's thoughts that either defile or purify a person. One's thoughts mold one's nature and control one's destiny. Evil thoughts tend to debase one just as good thoughts tend to elevate one. Sometimes a single thought can either destroy or save a world.

Sammā Saṅkappa serves the double purpose of eliminating evil thoughts and

developing pure thoughts. Right thoughts, in this connection are threefold: thoughts (1) of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (2) of goodwill (*avyāpāda*), and (3) of compassion (*avihiṃsā*).

These good and evil forces are latent in all. As long as we are worldlings (*puthujjana*), these evil forces rise to the surface at unexpected moments in disconcerting strength. When once they are totally eradicated on attaining Arahantship, one's stream of consciousness has become perfectly purified.

Attachment and hatred, coupled with ignorance, are the chief causes of all evil prevalent in this deluded world. “The enemy of the whole world is lust, through which all evils come to living beings. This lust, when obstructed by some cause, is transformed into wrath.”

One is either attached to desirable external objects or repulsed with aversion in the case of undesirable objects. Through attachment, one clings to material pleasures and tries to gratify one's desires by some means or other. Through aversion, one recoils from undesirable objects and even goes to the extent of destroying them, inasmuch as their very presence is a source of irritation. With the giving up of egoism by one's own intuitive insight, both attachment and hatred automatically disappear.

The *Dhammapada* states:

There is no fire like lust, no grip like hatred. There is no net like delusion, no river like craving.

As one ascends the spiritual ladder, one renounces by degrees both gross and subtle involvement in material pleasures, like grown-up children giving up their childhood toys. Being children, they cannot be expected to possess an adult's understanding, and they cannot be convinced of the worthlessness of their temporary pleasures. With maturity, they begin to understand things as they truly are,

and they voluntarily give up their toys. As the spiritual pilgrim proceeds on the upward path by his constant meditation and reflection, he perceives the futility of pursuing base material pleasures and the resultant happiness in forsaking them. He cultivates non-attachment to the fullest degree. “Happy is non-attachment in this world, so is the transcending of all sensory pleasures”, is one of the early utterances of the Buddha.

The other most troublesome defilement is anger, aversion, ill will, or hatred, all of which are implied by the Pali term *vyāpāda*. It consumes the person in whom it arises and consumes others as well. The Pali term *avyāpāda*, literally, “nonenmity”, corresponds to the most beautiful virtue *mettā*, which means “loving-kindness” or “goodwill towards all without any distinction”. He whose mind is full of loving-kindness can harbor no hatred towards anyone. Like a mother who makes no difference between herself and her only child and protects it even at the risk of her own life, even so does the spiritual pilgrim who follows this Middle Path radiate his thoughts of loving-kindness, identifying himself with all. Buddhist *mettā* embraces all living beings, animals not excluded.

Harmlessness (*avihiṃsā*), or compassion (*karuṇā*), is the third and last member of *samkappa*.

Karuṇā is that sweet virtue that makes the tender hearts of the noble quiver at the sufferings of others. Like Buddhist *mettā*, Buddhist *karuṇā* is limitless. It is not restricted only to co-religionists or co-nationals or even to human beings alone. Compassion limited in any way is not true *karuṇā*.

A compassionate one is as soft as a flower. He cannot bear the sufferings of others. He might, at times, even go to the extent of sacrificing his own life to alleviate

the sufferings of others. In every *Jātaka* story, it is evident that the Bodhisatta tries his best to help the distressed and the forlorn and to promote their happiness in every possible way.

Karuṇā has the characteristics of a loving mother, whose thoughts, words, and deeds always tend to relieve the distress of her sick child. It has the property of not being able to tolerate the suffering of others. Its manifestation is perfect non-violence and harmlessness — that is, a compassionate person appears to be absolutely non-violent and harmless. The sight of the helpless states of the distressed is the proximate cause for the practice of *karuṇā*. The consummation of *karuṇā* is the eradication of all forms of cruelty. The direct enemy of *karuṇā* is cruelty, and the indirect enemy is homely grief.

Buddhist *mettā* appeals to both the rich and the poor, for Buddhism teaches its followers to elevate the lowly, help the poor, the needy, and the forlorn, tend the sick, comfort the bereaved, pity the wicked, and enlighten the ignorant.

Compassion forms the fundamental principle of both Buddhist lay persons and members of the Holy Order.

The Buddha advises His disciples thus:

Wherefore, O Bhikkhus, however men may speak concerning you, whether in season or out of season, whether appropriately or inappropriately, whether courteously or rudely, whether wisely or foolishly, whether kindly or maliciously, thus, O Bhikkhus, must you train yourselves: “Un sullied shall our minds remain, neither shall evil words escape our lips. Kind and compassionate ever shall we abide, with hearts harboring no ill will. And we shall enfold those very persons with streams of loving thoughts unfailing, and proceeding forth from them, we shall radiate the whole wide world with constant thoughts of loving-kindness, ample, expanding, measure-

*less, free from enmity, free from ill will.”
Thus must you train yourselves.*

He whose mind is free from selfish desires, hatred, and cruelty, and is saturated with the spirit of selflessness, loving-kindness, and harmlessness, lives in perfect peace. He is indeed a blessing to himself and others.

3. The third stage is Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*). It consists in abstinence from false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, and useless speech. In other words, right speech is speech that is not false, not harsh, not scandalous, not frivolous, that is, it consists of speech that is truthful, mild, pacifying, gentle, and wise.

He who tries to eradicate selfish desires cannot indulge in uttering falsehood or in slandering for any selfish end or purpose. He is truthful and trustworthy and ever seeks the good and beautiful in others instead of deceiving, defaming, denouncing, or disuniting his own fellow beings. A harmless mind that generates loving-kindness cannot give vent to harsh speech that first debases the speaker and then hurts another. What he utters is not only true, sweet, and pleasant but also useful, fruitful, and beneficial.

4. The fourth stage is Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*), that is, abstaining from intentional killing or harming any living creature, abstaining from taking what is not freely given, abstaining from sexual misconduct (adultery, rape, and seduction), and abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

These evil deeds are caused by craving and anger, coupled with ignorance. With the gradual elimination of these causes from the mind of the spiritual aspirant, blameworthy tendencies arising from them will no longer be manifested. Under no pretext will one kill or steal. Being pure in mind, one leads a pure life.

5. The fifth stage is Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*): giving up wrong livelihood, one earns one's living by a right form of livelihood, that is, from a livelihood that does not bring harm and suffering to other beings (avoiding sooth-saying, trickery, dishonesty, usury, and trading in weapons, meat, living beings, intoxicants, or poison).

Hypocritical conduct is cited as wrong livelihood for monks and nuns.

Strictly speaking, from an Abhidhamma standpoint, by right speech, right action, and right livelihood, three abstinences (*virati*) are meant, but not the three opposite virtues.

6. The sixth stage is Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*). It is the fourfold effort to put forth the energy, to prod the mind, and to struggle:

- a. To prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising;
- b. To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen;
- c. To develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen;
- d. To maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

In other words, it is the fourfold effort that we make to overcome and avoid fresh bad actions by body, speech, and mind and the effort that we make in developing fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace, and wisdom, and in cultivating them to perfection.

Right Effort plays a very important part in the Noble Eightfold Path. It is by one's own effort that one obtains deliverance and not by merely seeking refuge in others or by offering prayers.

Both a rubbish-heap of evil and a storehouse of virtue are found in man. By effort, one removes this rubbish-heap and cultivates the latent virtues.

7. The seventh stage is Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*), or alertness of mind. It consists of abiding self-possessed and attentive, contemplating according to reality:

- a. The body (*kāyānupassanā*);
- b. Feelings (*vedānānupassanā*);
- c. The state of the mind (*cittānupassanā*);
- d. The contents of the mind (*dhammānupassanā*);

seeing all as composite, ever-becoming, impermanent, and subject to decay. It is maintaining ever-ready mental clarity no matter what we are doing, speaking, or thinking and in keeping before our mind the realities of existence, that is, the impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and egolessness (*anattā*) of all forms of existence.

Mindfulness on these four objects tends to eradicate misconceptions with regard to desirability (*subha*), so-called “happiness” (*sukha*), permanence (*nicca*), and an immortal soul (*attā*) respectively.

8. The eighth stage is Right Concentration of mind (*Sammā Samādhi*). It consists of gaining one-pointedness of mind (*citt’ekaggatā*) and entering into and abiding in the four fine-material absorptions (*rūpajjhānas*) and the four immaterial absorptions (*arūpajjhānas*). Such a kind of mental concentration is one that is directed towards a morally wholesome object and always bound up with Right Thought, Right Effort, and Right Mindfulness.

A concentrated mind acts as a powerful aid to see things as they truly are by means of penetrative insight (*vipassanā*).

Thus, the Noble Eightfold Path is a path of morality (*sīla*), of mental training (*samādhi*), and of wisdom (*paññā*).

Morality consists of:

- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood

Mental training consists of:

- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

Wisdom consists of:

- Right Understanding
- Right Thought

According to the order of development, morality (*sīla*), mental training (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) are the three stages of the Path.

Thus, this liberating Eightfold Path is a path of inner training, of inner progress. By mere external worship, mere ceremonies and selfish prayer, one can never make any real progress in righteousness and insight. As the Buddha said:

Be your own island of refuge, be your own shelter, seek not for any other protection. Let the truth be your island of refuge, let the truth be your shelter, seek not after any other protection.

To be of real effect and to ensure absolute inner progress, all our efforts must be based upon our own understanding and insight. All absolute inner progress is rooted in Right Understanding, and, without Right Understanding, there is no attainment of perfection and of the unshakable peace of *nibbāna*.

Strictly speaking, from an ultimate point of view, the factors that make up the Noble Eightfold Path signify eight mental properties (*cetasika*) collectively found in four classes of supra-mundane consciousness (*lokuttara citta*), whose object is *nibbāna*. ■

Adapted from the Introduction to the
Dhammapada by Eknath Easwaran

Rites, Rituals, & Dogmatism

According to the Buddha's teaching, belief in the moral efficacy of mere external rites and rituals constitutes a great obstacle to inner progress. One who takes refuge in mere external practices is on the wrong path. For, in order to achieve real inner progress, all our efforts must necessarily be based on our own understanding and insight. Any real progress is rooted in right understanding, and, without right understanding, there will be no attainment of unshakable peace and holiness. Moreover, this blind belief in mere external practices is the cause of much misery and wretchedness in the world. It leads to mental stagnation, to fanaticism and intolerance, to self-exaltation and contempt for others, to contention, discord, war, strife, and bloodshed. This belief in mere external practices dulls and deadens one's power of thought and stifles every higher emotion in man. It makes him a mental slave and favors the growth of all kinds of hypocrisy.

Inasmuch as the Buddha teaches that all genuine progress on the path of virtue is necessarily dependent upon one's own understanding and insight, all dogmatism is excluded from the Buddha's teaching. Blind faith in authority is rejected by the Buddha and is entirely opposed to the spirit of His teaching.

One who merely believes or repeats what others have found out is compared by the Buddha to a blind man. One who desires to make progress upon the path of deliverance must experience and understand the truth for himself. Lacking one's own understanding, no absolute progress is possible.

It is the inward condition of a person and his deeds that count, not a mere name. The true disciple of the Buddha is far removed from all dogmatism. He is a free thinker in the noblest sense of the word. He falls neither into positive nor negative dogmas, for he knows: both are mere opinions, mere views, rooted in blindness and self-deception. ■

Wisdom

Wisdom (*paññā*) is the understanding, through personal experience, of the true nature of all conditioned things, that is, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and absence of a permanent entity such as a soul or self (*anattā*).

Wisdom is achieved through insight, or *vipassanā*, meditation. In insight meditation (*vipassanā bhāvanā*), the mind is set to a perfect state of balance, and then the attention is projected to the changing nature or the unsatisfactory nature or the impersonal nature of mental and physical phenomena. It is not a mere intellectual appreciation or conceptual knowledge of these truths, but an indubitable and unshakable personal experience of them, obtained and matured through repeated meditative confrontation with the facts underlying those truths. As the *Dhammapada* states (verses 277—279):

All compound things are transitory; those who realize this are free from suffering. This is the path that leads to wisdom.

All compound things are involved in sorrow; those who realize this are free from suffering. This is the path that leads to wisdom.

All states are without self; those who realize this are free from suffering. This is the path that leads to wisdom.

It is the intrinsic nature of insight that it produces a growing detachment and an increasing freedom from craving (*taṇhā*), culminating in the final deliverance of the mind from all that causes its enslavement to the world of suffering (*dukkha*). It is the nature of insight to be free from desire (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) and to see clearly all things in the inner and outer world as bare phenomena, that is, as impersonal processes. ■

Maha Ghosananda, Called Cambodia's Gandhi, Dies

BY DENNIS HEVESI

New York Times, 15 March 2007

Leverett, Mass. (USA) — The Venerable Maha Ghosananda, a Buddhist monk who led the rebuilding of his religion in Cambodia, calling for peace and reconciliation after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, died Monday in Northampton, Massachusetts. He was in his late 70s and lived in Providence, Rhode Island, and Leverett, Massachusetts.

The death was confirmed by Christina Trincherro, a spokeswoman for Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton.

Cambodian monks elected Maha Ghosananda (his monastic name) as a supreme Buddhist patriarch in 1988. By then, his efforts to bring solace to a nation in which more than 1.5 million people were starved, worked to death, or executed under the Communist dictatorship of Pol Pot had inspired many to call him “the Cambodian Gandhi.”

In his 2002 book, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines With the World's Great Peacemakers*, Scott A. Hunt, a professor of Buddhism at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote that Maha Ghosananda's ability to forgive those “responsible for the murder of his entire family is incomprehensible,” until one heard his explanation of Buddhism.

Maha Ghosananda said he “does not question that loving one's oppressors — Cambodians loving the Khmer Rouge — may be the most difficult attitude to achieve,” then added, “but it is the law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle.”

“Reconciliation,” he continued, “means that we see ourselves as the opponent; for what is the opponent but a being in ignorance, and we ourselves are also ignorant of many things.”

Somdet Phra Maha Ghosananda was born in Takeo, Cambodia, in 1929. He was initiated into the Cambodian Buddhist Order in 1943. In 1969, he received a doctorate from Nalanda University in Bihar State, India.

He was living in a monastery in southern Thailand when a five-year civil war ended in Cambodia in 1976, with Pol Pot establishing what he called Democratic Kampuchea. Within days, almost the entire population of Phnom Penh, the capital, had been marched into the countryside to do forced labor. The Khmer Rouge closed about 3,600 Buddhist temples throughout the country. By the time Vietnamese forces overthrew the regime 44 months later, only about 3,000 of Cambodia's 60,000 Buddhist priests were still alive.

By then, Maha Ghosananda had already trekked from one refugee camp to another along the border with Thailand, establishing Buddhist temples and training new monks. He continued that work throughout the country after the ouster of Pol Pot.

Maha Ghosananda moved to Massachusetts in the late 1980s at the invitation of a Buddhist order in Leverett. But in 1991, he returned to Cambodia to lead a 16-day pilgrimage across the country — gathering followers from village after village — in the first of what became known as the Dhammayetra Walks for Peace and Reconciliation.

In 1998, the Niwano Peace Foundation of Japan awarded Maha Ghosananda its peace prize, saying in its citation that “through these walks, Maha Ghosananda became a bridge of peace — bringing together people who had been separated by war — and wiped away their fears with his call for peace.”

Pointing out that Maha Ghosananda had promoted nonviolence as a remedy for other causes, including deforestation and the use of land mines, the foundation also said, “In both spirit and deed, he has shown the way to a fundamental resolution of regional and ethnic strife around the world.” ■



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